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Item 121 of the preliminary list*

Pattern of conferences

Results of the review of entitlements carried out by subsidiary bodies that have not fully utilized their meeting entitlements, including the duration of their sessions; review problems and factors involved in bodies whose utilization factor was below the benchmark figure for at least three sessions

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the bodies that had not fully utilized their meeting entitlements, including the duration of their sessions, to review their meeting entitlements and to report the results of their review to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences. The report contained in section II below is submitted in response to that request. It was prepared on the basis of the written replies received from 16 of the 23 bodies queried.

2. In paragraph 12 of the aforementioned resolution, the General Assembly reiterated its request to the Committee, in consultation with the organs concerned, to examine the cases where the utilization factor was lower than the established benchmark figure for at least three sessions, with a view to reporting on problems and factors that had given rise to such a situation, and to make appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. Moreover, in paragraph 46 of its 1996 report to the General Assembly,[1] the Committee on Conferences requested its Chairman to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairmen of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. The report contained in section III below, which is submitted in response to those requests, was prepared on the basis of written replies received from, and consultations with, three of the four bodies in question. The outcome of the consultations with the Chairman of the Committee on Information will be contained in an addendum.

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II. Review of subsidiary bodies that have not fully utilized their meeting entitlements, including the duration of their sessions

A. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

3. In the view of the Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the statistics for 1995 do not completely reflect that body's situation. There was a particular problem in adjusting the final statistics, as they were based on forecasted demands rather than on actual resources utilized. That situation has now been rectified, and since the session of the Board in October 1996, and in follow-up to the reform and restructuring of UNCTAD and its intergovernmental machinery at the ninth session, in Midrand, major changes have occurred.

4. First, a point has been made, at consultations of the President of the Trade and Development Board and at official meetings, to draw the attention of delegations to the decisions of the Committee on Conferences and the Trade and Development Board, as well as to the importance of the efficient use of resources.

5. Secondly, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD has taken an active interest in the efficient conduct of the intergovernmental process. He has communicated to all States members of UNCTAD detailed observations and proposals on how to meet the challenge of improving its intergovernmental machinery.

6. Thirdly, the number of UNCTAD meetings has been cut by virtually 50 per cent, and the duration of the meetings has been reduced. In addition, parallel meetings are being avoided, which puts the secretariat in a better position to forecast demands for meetings and at the same time reduce the resources required to the very minimum. In fact, one of the major problems contributing to the underutilization of resources had been the need to ensure flexibility in order to have resources available should meetings or negotiations continue beyond the forecasted time or dates. That need has now been totally eliminated by the excellent coordination and communication that has developed between the Board secretariat and the Conference Services Division at the United Nations Office at Geneva, which has developed a new methodology for tailoring services to actual requirements. In the view of the Board, this spirit of cooperation and coordination between the two secretariats has resulted in a marked improvement in the use of resources.

7. With regard to the matter of early ending, which is treated as underutilization, the nature of the work of UNCTAD, particularly sensitive negotiations and discussions, should allow presiding officers to close meetings as soon as consensus has been reached, and thus avoid breakdowns or intractable debates.

8. Lastly, the President of the Trade and Development Board will continue to draw the attention of the Board and of delegations to the relevant General Assembly resolutions and decisions on measures to improve the utilization of resources.

B. Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

9. The schedule of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions is determined by the requirements of the Fifth Committee and the other intergovernmental bodies to which it reports. For example, the Advisory Committee recently instituted a winter session (February/March) as part of the budgetary cycle for the consideration of the financing of peacekeeping operations approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/233 of 23 December 1994. The Advisory Committee's agenda is very heavy, especially in view of the recent developments in peacekeeping, the financial crisis and various proposals for reform. In its view, the Advisory Committee utilizes conference services as efficiently as possible. In this connection, it reports that all its meetings start on time. Sometimes meetings end early for a variety of reasons. However, in the view of the Advisory Committee, the fact that a meeting has adjourned early, because, for example, agreement has been reached speedily, does not mean that conference services are being underutilized. If it is necessary to cancel a meeting, care is taken whenever possible to ensure that sufficient notice is given to Conference Services.

10. The members of the Advisory Committee have shown great flexibility, understanding and cooperation as regards both interpretation and translation services. Meetings are often held, without prejudice to the rights of the members to full language services, with less than the full complement of interpreters and with documentation in advance form and in English only.

C. Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations

11. In response to the need to enhance the efficient use of conference services, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations introduced a number of measures in 1996. For example, the Bureau established, well in advance of the Special Committee's 1996 Informal Working Group, rather firm limits on the number of sessions allocated for the general debate.

12. In addition, the working methods of the Informal Working Group were changed. Instead of initiating drafting discussions on a myriad of issues, the debate in 1996 began on the basis of a draft that had, to the extent possible, already rationalized the proposals made by the delegations during the general debate.

13. The new approaches have proved to be fruitful. In 1995 it was necessary to cancel nearly one third of the 38 planned meetings. In 1996, by introducing the aforementioned measures, the number of cancelled meetings was reduced to less than a quarter of the 36 scheduled meetings. Moreover, in 1995 the Special Committee's utilization factor was 54 per cent, whereas at the last meeting of the Special Committee, that figure was increased to 61 per cent. The Special Committee will strive to increase its efficiency further during its 1997 session.

D. Committee on Information

14. During its eighteenth session, held from 6 to 17 May 1996, the Committee on Information held nine formal meetings, with a total of 60 speakers, one briefing session with the Department of Public Information with 49 participants, three meetings of the Group of 77, and three consultations on the draft resolution. In addition, three requests for conference services were cancelled prior to the opening session of the Committee.

15. For its nineteenth session, in 1997, the Committee is planning five plenary meetings and one meeting of consultations (in a smaller conference room), between 13 and 19 May, two meetings of larger regional groups and a closing plenary meeting during the September segment of the session.

E. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

16. The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has made a considerable effort to reduce its demands on Conference Services. For example, as of this year, the Spanish-speaking member of the Working Group has, on an exceptional basis, agreed to work in English. Therefore, the Working Group no longer requires English/Spanish interpretation on a full-time basis, but only when non-English-speaking Governments or non-governmental organizations request to meet with the Working Group. The Working Group has also considerably reduced its requests for pre-, in- and post-session translation, as well as reduced the length of its annual report from 180 pages in 1993 to 117 in 1996. In addition, in compliance with the appeal made in 1995 for a reduction in the length of meetings due to be held before the end of the year, the Working Group agreed to reduce the length of its session in November 1995 by three days.

17. During its sessions, however, the Working Group requires time for informal consultations with Governments and witnesses, which frequently take place prior to the opening of the morning or afternoon meeting. As such consultations are often unforeseeable, and depend not only on the Working Group, but also on its interlocutors, they do, on occasion, delay the start of a meeting. Nevertheless, all efforts will continue to be made to ensure efficient utilization of conference services.

F. Statistical Commission

18. In its view, the Statistical Commission has had very high utilization of the conference services provided to it. Until recently, the Commission's sessions were scheduled for eight days, but in a review of its own functioning, it reduced the sessions to five days on an experimental basis. In addition, the Commission approves the organization of its session, which includes a suggested number of hours to be allocated to each agenda item so as to ensure successful completion of the agenda. Members are encouraged to limit the length of their interventions and to avoid providing technical details of national practices and experiences in their interventions. The Commission will continue to conduct its sessions along the lines referred to, and request only the amount of conference services estimated to be necessary to cover adequately the agenda that it recommends to the Economic and Social Council.

G. Commission on Narcotic Drugs

19. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs held reconvened sessions in 1993 and 1995 to examine budgetary matters. In both instances, conference services were forecast for four meetings (two each day), although it was intended that the morning of the second day would, in fact, be used for informal consultations among interested delegations while the Secretariat was finalizing the draft report for presentation on the afternoon of the second day. That arrangement led to an automatic loss of 25 per cent of forecast conference services, resulting in utilization of less than 80 per cent of resources, although the Commission at its regular sessions has always had utilization well in excess of 80 per cent.

20. In order to avoid built-in underutilization, future reconvened sessions will be forecast at three meetings rather than four. It should be noted that Conference Services was always aware that interpretation would not be required on the morning of the second day, and could be redeployed to other meetings.

H. United Nations Children's Fund – Executive Board

21. In its endeavour to comply fully with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions on improved utilization of conference-servicing resources, the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has taken the following measures:

(a) Spare no effort to start all meetings on time;

(b) Improve time management during sessions, for example, by limiting interventions to five minutes, as measured by an electronic timer. All Executive Board members have demonstrated their genuine will to adhere to time limits;

(c) Plan utilization of time allocated for sessions more effectively. Issues requiring further time for discussion could be tabled for further consultations. Similarly, it was decided that time saved on the planned agenda could be used for informal consultations, thus making it unnecessary to convene additional informal sessions;

(d) Plan meetings more effectively. An annual work plan for all upcoming meetings in the following year is drawn up during the third regular session of the Executive Board. The requirements in terms of time are based on the issues and documents to be discussed.

I. United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund – Executive Board

22. The Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund (UNDP/UNFPA) has made considerable progress in reducing late starting and early ending of meetings. Efforts to ensure punctuality and full utilization of conference-servicing resources were continued by the Executive Board in 1997.

J. United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

23. The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation generally requires two conference rooms for parallel sessions during its annual meetings. As it was foreseen that some discussions would probably take place in combined session, and as most of the delegates were highly proficient in English, arrangements were made for interpretation in one conference room only. In addition, by agreement, documentation was issued in English only. Considerable savings in conference-servicing resources were thus made. The aforementioned practices will continue to be applied.

K. Commission on Population and Development

24. The twenty-ninth session of the Commission on Population and Development was the first meeting of the Commission following the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in September 1994. The Commission met to discuss its revitalization, terms of reference, duration of meetings, secretariat support, management, inter-agency coordination and resource base, the work programme and proposed agenda and documentation for the following five years.

25. During the eight days the Commission was in session, 10 formal meetings and five informal meetings were held. The Commission met in more informal sessions than had been anticipated owing to the nature of the resolutions, a factor that could not have been foreseen prior to the convening of the International Conference. In the view of the Commission, the informal sessions were successful to the point that it was able to conclude its session one-half day earlier than anticipated. In addition, because of the

importance of the twenty-ninth session, there were numerous meetings among the Commission members and Secretariat staff. The Bureau of the Commission met daily, and sometimes twice a day, to finalize the report and draft resolutions and decisions. The Commission decided that, beginning in 1996, instead of meeting biennially for eight days, it should meet annually for five days.

L. Committee on the Rights of the Child

26. In a spirit of understanding for the current financial constraints experienced by the Organization, the Committee on the Rights of the Child agreed to take a number of cost-saving measures, including dispensing with the translation of its documents and with summary records whenever possible.

27. However, in view of the nature of its activities, based essentially on dialogue with States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and monitoring the implementation of the Convention in those States, the Committee needs to interact with a wide range of partners involved in protecting and promoting the rights of the child at the national and international levels, including Governments, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and other competent bodies. Considering the need to organize meetings with such a variety of entities, a certain amount of flexibility is required, which sometimes might regrettably lead to the cancellation of official meetings or to other readjustments that result in underutilization of resources planned. In its view, in spite of those constraints, the Committee has striven to limit such cases to a minimum.

M. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Executive Committee

28. In 1995 the Executive Committee of the programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees cancelled two meetings and lost the equivalent of one meeting owing to late starting. Those factors account for its low utilization that year.

29. In the view of the Executive Committee, early ending is a complex matter, as in some cases it may be a sign of efficiency. The early closure of Executive Committee meetings has often related to portions of conference-servicing time reserved for the adoption of reports. Such meetings are susceptible to early ending if the report enjoys an easy passage. Moreover, in a session that lasts 4.5 working days only, they inevitably represent a higher percentage of total meeting time. It should be noted that the length of the Executive Committee plenary session has been shortened from 10 days to 4.5 working days in recent years, a measure which, in itself, has resulted in considerable savings under the conference-servicing budget.

30. The concern expressed by the Committee on Conferences was brought to the attention of the Standing Committee at its meeting in April/May 1997. It was agreed that every effort would be made to improve the performance of both the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee, notably in respect of late starting, and that the question of underutilization of conference-servicing resources would be kept under review by the Standing Committee.

III. Review of the problems and factors involved in bodies whose utilization factor was below the benchmark figure for at least three sessions

31. As part of the consultations referred to in paragraph 2 above, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences met with the Chairmen of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization and the Commission on the Status of Women, and with the President of the Economic and Social Council. The following report focuses on the outcome of the consultations. Consultations have yet to be held with the Chairman of the Committee on Information.

A. Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization

32. On 19 May 1997, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences met with the Chairman of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization. The Chairman of the Special Committee stated that, in an effort to utilize conference-servicing resources more efficiently, that body had reduced the duration of its session from the initial entitlement of four weeks to three weeks, and beginning in 1995, the session was shortened again to two weeks. Any decision to reduce the session further was inextricably linked to the role and mandate given to the Special Committee in future. Numerous factors were involved in that regard. Indeed, at some times the body's mandate was more precise

than at others, and certain issues were more ripe for consideration than others at one time or another.

33. In response to suggestions for strengthening utilization, the Chairman of the Special Committee informed the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences that, while pre-sessional informal consultations were held with a view to establishing a timetable for consideration of items on the agenda of the Special Committee and to improving that body's organization of work, it was nonetheless not possible to foresee all aspects of the debate or its outcome. In addition, because of the nature of the Special Committee's work, delegations required special instructions from their Governments, a fact that frequently caused delays and cancellations. Moreover, in view of the brief duration of the session, it was difficult to predict very far in advance when it would be necessary to cancel meetings.

34. In any event, it should be borne in mind that the progress made by any body should not be assessed in terms of uncancelled meetings, and the cooperation of delegations with the Bureau and the Secretariat was essential in order to improve utilization of conference-servicing resources.

B. Economic and Social Council

35. Consultations between the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences were held on 22 May 1997. The various factors involved in computing the utilization statistics were clarified, and suggestions for improving utilization of conference-servicing resources were made.

36. One of the principal factors contributing to underutilization has been overestimation of meetings needed, in particular parallel meetings, which are an essential feature of the Council's work. The General Assembly has taken the decision to reduce the sessions of the Council from five weeks to four weeks, which is expected to improve planning of parallel meetings, thereby reducing cancellations. In addition, the President of the Council assured the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences that he would spare no effort to make members aware of the important part they played, for example, in terms of punctuality, in ensuring efficient and effective utilization of conference-servicing resources.

C. Commission on the Status of Women

37. The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences held consultations with the Chairman of the Commission on the Status of Women on 29 May 1997. While the Commission has demonstrated a clear trend towards improvement in its utilization of conference-servicing resources since 1994, the major factor responsible for underutilization - late starting of meetings - appeared to be worsening.

38. The Chairman of the Commission informed the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences that following the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995, the Commission had lost considerable time in its effort to identify a chairperson, which was a problem that had since been solved. In addition, the Commission had held numerous consultations with a view to improving its methods of work so as to strengthen the utilization of conference-servicing resources. In that regard, the Commission sought to improve inter-sessional planning and to have a detailed perspective of its work. Moreover, with a view to facilitating the conduct of its work, the Commission had taken the decision to reflect the outcome of its deliberations in agreed conclusions rather than in resolutions.

39. The Commission had taken other steps to improve utilization, as well. A time limit for speakers had been established, and an electronic signalling device was in place to enforce the rule. Moreover, the general debate had been reduced considerably. Further efforts would focus on ensuring that the panellists involved in panel sessions were aware of the ways and means to improve utilization of conference-servicing resources, waiving the quorum requirement so that meetings could begin on time and suspending meetings upon opening them in order to enable the Group of 77 to hold consultations, in which case the Commission would not be penalized for starting late.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/51/32 and Corr.1 and Add.1).

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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Results of the review of entitlements carried out by subsidiary bodies that have not fully utilized their meeting entitlements, including the duration of their sessions; review of the problems and factors involved in bodies whose utilization factor was below the benchmark figure for at least three sessions

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

II. REVIEW OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES THAT HAVE NOT FULLY UTILIZED THEIR MEETING ENTITLEMENTS, INCLUDING THE DURATION OF THEIR SESSIONS

N. United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, Working Group on International Contract Practices, Working Group on Electronic Data Interchange and Working Group on Insolvency Law

1. The three working groups of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) have reported that some of the time lost owing to early ending in the statistics was due to informal consultations called for by their chairmen. They are of the view that efforts should be made to optimize the use of conference-servicing resources, in particular by starting meetings on time.

2. To that end, delegates to recent UNCITRAL meetings have been reminded of the need to make the most effective use of the conference-servicing resources allocated to them. Recent UNCITRAL meetings held at Vienna show a considerable

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increase in the use of such resources. For example, the utilization factor of the twentieth session of the Working Group on Insolvency Law, held in October 1996, was 89 per cent, and the utilization factor of the thirty-first session of UNCITRAL, held in May 1997, is also expected to exceed the benchmark by a considerable margin.

III. REVIEW OF THE PROBLEMS AND FACTORS INVOLVED IN BODIES WHOSE UTILIZATION FACTOR WAS BELOW THE BENCHMARK FIGURE FOR AT LEAST THREE SESSIONS

D. Committee on Information

3. On 7 July 1997, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences held consultations with the Chairman of the Committee on Information. The statistical record of the Committee on Information over the past three years was reviewed. The Chairman of that Committee noted that, given the nature of the subject-matter it considered, delegations did not always participate actively in the discussion early on, preferring instead to make their statements after following the course of the debate. That state of affairs was a factor that resulted in early adjournments and thus low utilization of conference-servicing resources.

4. However, in 1997, inasmuch as public information was part of the reform initiative of the Secretary-General, it was anticipated that more active participation could be expected and that more efficient use would be made of the conference-servicing resources available to the Committee. It was also pointed out that fewer meetings had been requested for 1997 on the basis of previous utilization statistics.

5. The Chairman assured the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences that the matters raised during the consultations would be communicated to the Bureau and the members of the Committee on Information.

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Pattern of conferences

Subsidiary bodies authorized to meet away from their established headquarters in accordance with section I, paragraph 4, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 20 of its resolution 48/222 A of 23 December 1993, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to review the legal basis and experience of all subsidiary bodies that meet away from their established headquarters, thus constituting a departure from General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1995, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session through the Committee on Conferences. The report in question is contained in document A/49/212.

2. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly invited all its subsidiary bodies that are authorized to meet away from their established headquarters to review, in the interests of improved efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the exception to the headquarters rule in the light of the current situation of their work, and to make recommendations thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the Assembly at its fifty-second session.

3. In paragraph 9, the Assembly invited the Economic and Social Council to request all its subsidiary bodies to carry out the same review referred to in the preceding paragraph.

4. The present report, which is submitted in response to the aforementioned invitations, was prepared on the basis of written replies received from the bodies in question. It is in fact an updated version of document A/49/212, which contains background information that may be of use in consideration of the matter. Replies received after the submission of the report will be presented in an addendum.

II. Replies received from subsidiary bodies that meet away from their established headquarters

A. Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund

5. In paragraph 4 (a) of its resolution 40/243, the General Assembly laid down that the regular sessions of the

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Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shall be held alternately at United Nations Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The open-ended ad hoc working group on rules of procedure for the Executive Board of UNDP and the United Nations Population Fund, established by Board decision 96/25 of 15 May 1996, reviewed, *inter alia*, the issue of the location of the Board's annual meeting, which was convened every other year at Geneva, and recommended that the arrangement be continued. At its annual session of 1997, the Executive Board adopted its rules of procedure, which specify the alternating pattern of venues initially laid down in resolution 40/243.

B. International Law Commission

6. In its resolution 984 (X) of 3 December 1955, the General Assembly decided to amend article 12 of the statute of the International Law Commission (ILC) as follows:

> "The Commission shall sit at the European Office of the United Nations at Geneva. The Commission shall, however, have the right to hold meetings at other places after consultation with the Secretary-General."

7. Subsequently, in paragraph 4 (b) of its resolution 40/243, the General Assembly laid down that the sessions of ILC shall be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

C. United Nations Commission on International Trade Law

8. The experience of the past three years has confirmed that the continued involvement of the permanent missions in New York by virtue of the alternating pattern of meetings in New York and Vienna is still of vital importance to the work of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and the acceptability of its legal texts. The authorization to hold every second meeting of the Commission and its Working Groups in New York ensures the continued long-term and coordinated involvement of legal experts from the permanent missions, which is especially relevant for developing and newly emerging countries.

9. Representation of States continued to be better in New York than at Vienna, and meetings in New York were attended by considerably more legal experts from the permanent missions. It may be noted that the representation continued to be markedly better as regards the number of representatives listed, and even more so in terms of actual presence in the meeting room and active participation.

10. The work of UNCITRAL continued to be predominantly followed and coordinated by missions in New York, as more States have missions there, and considerably more missions in New York have a legal expert on their staff.

11. Broad representation in meetings of UNCITRAL is of critical importance to its work, as the main goal of the Commission is to elaborate legal texts that are universally acceptable to States of all regions and with different legal and economic systems. In addition, the long-term and coordinated involvement of interested Governments is necessary in view of the fact that the task of elaborating such texts takes five and often more years. It may be noted that, in view of the technical nature of the work topics of UNCITRAL, such involvement is best carried out by lawyers. Those observations apply in particular to developing and newly emerging countries that tend to have missions in New York but not at Vienna. The same is true of those States that cannot afford to send a specialist lawyer from their capital, but must rely on their mission staff in New York.

12. If the traditional and highly beneficial involvement of the missions in New York were to be terminated, the broad participation of developing States, which constitutes the most distinct hallmark of the unification of world trade law carried out by UNCITRAL, would be clearly endangered. It may be noted that with the emergence of a number of new States and the globalization of trade, the participation of developing and newly emerging States has taken on additional importance for their economic development and the preservation of world peace.

13. In addition to the foregoing, the alternating pattern of meetings has proved to be beneficial in other respects. The Commission's training and technical assistance programme, which has taken on increased importance with the emergence of economies in transition from a centrally planned system to a market system, is greatly facilitated through useful contacts made during the sessions held in New York. Moreover, the meetings in New York make it possible for the secretariat to organize events useful not only to disseminate the work of the Commission, but also to tap the local expertise available with regard to trade law matters, without any additional cost to the Organization.

D. International Civil Service Commission

14. The current situation as regards the organizations participating in the work of the International Civil Service Commission and the distribution of staff of those organizations by location is the same, substantially, as in 1975. As the General Assembly has noted in the recent past, the need for Commission members to maintain close contact with all organizations, their legislative or governing bodies and their staff has never been greater. Arranging for venues of its meetings on a rotating basis continues to provide a unique opportunity for members to understand the problems faced by the executive heads and staff of the organizations headquartered at various locations. This has also provided an opportunity for the executive head(s) at a particular location to participate in Commission meetings and apprise the Commission of the organization's mission and concerns. The organizations have also felt that the rotation of venues has enabled their staff to observe the functioning of the Commission on a first-hand basis. The Commission is therefore of the view that the exception to the headquarters rule authorized by the General Assembly since the inception of the Commission in 1975 should continue to be granted in the future, and recommends to the General Assembly to authorize it to accept invitations from participating organizations to hold a session or sessions at their headquarters in years when more than one session is held.

E. Conference on Disarmament

15. The special nature of the Conference on Disarmament was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in paragraph 5 of its resolution 47/54 G of 8 April 1993, by which the Assembly:

> "Notes the fact that the Conference on Disarmament, as the single global disarmament negotiating forum, is a body of limited composition taking its decisions on the basis of consensus and maintains its special status in relationship with the United Nations disarmament machinery."

16. From its inception in 1959, the body's recognized and established headquarters has been the United Nations Office at Geneva. Moreover, it should be noted that the five permanent members of the Security Council, as well as Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, have established at Geneva special missions accredited to the Conference on Disarmament and headed by ambassadors. The other members of the Conference have appointed specialized staff members who represent them in the Conference.

F. Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters

17. The Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters was set up by the Secretary-General in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1273 (XLIII) of 4 August 1967. The Ad Hoc Group has always been convened at Geneva, owing to financial considerations: most of the participants attending the meetings are geographically closer to Europe, enabling the secretariat to reduce costs. Moreover, as its sessions are convened in December, the Ad Hoc Group would have to compete for services at Headquarters during the General Assembly session.

G. Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination

18. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination has held its last two, and three of its last four, meetings in New York. Its next meeting, in February 1998, is also scheduled to be held in New York. The Working Group intends to hold all of its future meetings in New York.

H. Committee for Development Planning – Working Group

19. At its recent thirty-first session, the Committee for Development Planning reviewed its practice of occasionally holding one of the annual meetings of its Working Group at venues other than New York. The Committee concluded that when deliberations on the subject matter dealt with by one of its Working Groups could be enhanced by the expertise available in the secretariats of other organizations of the United Nations system, it was highly cost-effective to hold such meetings at other United Nations duty stations. The Committee recommends that this practice should continue when justified on substantive grounds.

I. Commission on Narcotic Drugs: Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East

20. By its resolution 1992/28 of 30 July 1992, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Subcommission should, in principle, meet annually for a period of five days in one of the countries covered by the region of the Subcommission. Recently, meetings of the Subcommission have been held at Amman (1996) and at Baku (1997). Such regional meetings continue to be particularly useful in enabling regional and subregional coordination among national operational agencies involved in drug-trafficking countermeasures.

21. A letter of agreement between a Government hosting a meeting of the Subcommission and the United Nations is signed prior to each meeting, in particular with a view to implementing the provisions of section I, paragraph 5, of resolution 40/243, as applicable.

J. "Cooperation" meetings between the Secretariat and the secretariat of the Organization of African Unity

22. In paragraph 24 of its resolution 51/151 of 13 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the convening of a meeting to be held at Addis Ababa in 1997 between the Secretariat and the secretariat of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The objective of the meeting is to review and evaluate the progress in the implementation of the existing programmes of cooperation between the two organizations and to adopt measures for new and effective joint action.

23. Since 1980, the majority of the meetings between the two secretariats have been held at Addis Ababa. As nearly all United Nations programmes, organizations and agencies have representatives at Addis Ababa, the headquarters of OAU, the convening of the meetings there was considered to be cost-effective for participants from the United Nations system and from OAU. It is with this in mind that the sponsors and supporters of General Assembly resolutions on cooperation between the United Nations and OAU have in recent years ensured that Addis Ababa is mentioned in the relevant resolutions as the venue of the meetings.

K. "Cooperation" meetings between the Secretariat and the secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference

24. "Cooperation" meetings between the Secretariat and the secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference are mandated by General Assembly resolutions. Until 1995, such resolutions mandated annual general meetings of the two organizations. However, as an economy measure, the Assembly, in its resolution 50/17 of 20 November 1995, recommended that the meetings should henceforth take place once every two years, and that meetings of focal points of the specialized agencies of the two organizations, which, until that time, had taken place every other year, be held concurrently with the biennialized general meetings of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

25. Moreover, General Assembly resolutions on cooperation between the two organizations have also traditionally called on them to consult with one another on an appropriate date and venue for the convening of each general meeting (although resolution 48/24 of 24 November 1993 did, as an exception, specifically recommend that one such meeting should be held at Geneva in May 1994). The ensuing consultations between the two organizations and their specialized agencies have, on each occasion, led to mutual agreement on Geneva as the appropriate venue for the general meeting.

26. Geneva is viewed by both organizations to be a more cost-effective venue than New York in the light of the fact that many of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, whose representatives constitute the majority of the meetings' participants, are located there. Geneva is also closer in location to the headquarters of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Jeddah) and its specialized institutions.

27. It is therefore recommended that, for reasons of cost-effectiveness for both organizations, Geneva should be maintained as the venue for general meetings between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which, as noted above, have now been biennialized.

L. "Cooperation" meetings between the Secretariat and the secretariat of the League of Arab States

28. The meetings on cooperation between the Secretariat and the general secretariat of the League of Arab States have taken place at Geneva or Vienna primarily because a large number of United Nations agencies and programmes are based in those cities. That arrangement results in minimal cost to the Organization. Only two officers from Headquarters travel to Europe.

29. Should the United Nations decide to hold the meetings in New York, that action might result in a request on the part of the League to convene them in Cairo, the headquarters of the League of Arab States, which could increase substantially overall United Nations expenses for travel and lodging. Moreover, Geneva and Vienna are well prepared to host the "cooperation" meetings, and both venues are more or less midway between New York and Cairo.

M. Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

30. While the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories is a General Assembly organ, its mandate is serviced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights at its headquarters at Geneva, which provides the Special Committee with its secretariat.

31. The Special Committee reports that, since its establishment in 1968, it has repeatedly tried to obtain the cooperation of the Government of Israel, but has consistently been denied such cooperation, and thereby access to the occupied territories. The Special Committee has therefore been obliged to base its reports on relevant written material, as well as on the testimony of persons having first-hand and recent experience of the human rights situation in the occupied territories, which it hears in Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Special Committee holds three annual meetings, two of which are convened at the headquarters of its secretariat, at Geneva, while the second series of meetings is combined with a fact-finding mission to the area in order to hear testimonies.

N. Commission on Human Rights: Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

32. The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances is one of the extra-conventional mechanisms established by the Commission on Human Rights. Its main purpose is to deal with individual cases of disappearances, trying to assist the relatives of disappeared persons to ascertain the fate and whereabouts of their missing family members. For this purpose, the Group receives and examines reports on disappearances submitted by relatives of missing persons or human rights organizations acting on their behalf. An important number of cases before the Working Group are from Latin America. In view of the importance the Group attaches to direct contacts with the families of the persons who have disappeared and the organizations representing them, the Group has traditionally met once a year in New York, because it has always been easier for sources, particularly in the Americas, to go to New York than to Geneva. In fact, many of them would never meet with the Working Group if they had to bear the expense of travel to Geneva.

33. In addition, a number of Governments with cases of disappearances pending before the Working Group do not have a permanent mission at Geneva, and it has been most useful for the Working Group to be able to have contact with those missions in New York.

34. The Working Group is most aware of the need to ensure cost-effectiveness and efficiency in carrying out its mandate. However, it believes that in order to fulfil its task, contact with its sources is of paramount importance, and that many organizations that provide it with information would be unable ever to meet with it if it did not hold one session a year in New York.

O. Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

35. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly with a mandate to mobilize international support for, and assistance to, the Palestinian people and to heighten awareness of all aspects of the question of Palestine by organizing forums aimed at facilitating the consideration of relevant issues and promoting dialogue among parties concerned, Governments, United Nations bodies, non-

governmental organizations and prominent personalities, including Israelis and Palestinians.

36. In pursuance of those objectives, and on the basis of its mandate renewed by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/23 of 4 December 1996, the Committee will continue to organize seminars, symposiums and international meetings away from Headquarters, in different regions of the world, in order to inform public opinion of the various aspects of the question of Palestine. Relevant provision has been made in the programme budget approved by the General Assembly.

37. The Committee has continued to take steps to enhance its effectiveness and achieve optimal utilization of available resources in the accomplishment of its mandate in the light of changing political circumstances, while taking into account the continued financial crisis of the Organization. While seminars and non-governmental organization meetings held away from Headquarters are not hosted by Governments and are therefore held as an exception to General Assembly resolution 40/243, many of the Governments concerned have given the Committee some facilities free of charge or made financial contributions towards the holding of those meetings.

P. Administrative Committee on Coordination

38. Historically, the Administrative Committee on Coordination has held two meetings a year, alternating between New York and Geneva, although there have been numerous instances where the spring meeting has been hosted by other agencies members of the Committee.

Q. United Nations Administrative Tribunal

39. Since its establishment, the Administrative Tribunal has held one session a year at Geneva, in spring or summer, and one session in New York, in autumn. It has on occasion held an extraordinary session.

40. The reasons for alternating the annual sessions between New York and Geneva include the effort to balance the onus of travel for members of the Tribunal and, most important, the fact that a large proportion of staff to whom the Tribunal is open are located at duty stations in Europe (Geneva and Vienna) and Africa.

R. United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board, Standing Committee and Committee of Actuaries

41. The United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund is an inter-agency entity consisting of 19 member organizations, of which the United Nations is one. The Pension Board is a tripartite body with equal representation of the governing bodies, the executive heads and participants of the member organizations of the Fund. It has been the established practice of the Board to hold its session at the headquarters of various member organizations of the Fund on a more or less rotational basis, in response to invitations from individual member organizations. The Board currently meets biennially, in even-numbered years. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) hosted the session of the Board at Vienna in 1994, and the International Labour Organization was host at Turin, Italy, in 1996. The date and venue for 1998 have yet to be determined.

42. The Standing Committee of the Board usually meets at the end of each regular Board session and, in lieu of the Board, in odd-numbered years, to deal with matters delegated to it by the Board. In odd-numbered years, the Standing Committee normally meets in New York. The Committee of Actuaries, which advises the Board and/or the Standing Committee on actuarial matters, meets annually in New York for three or four days.

43. The costs of services and facilities for Board sessions or Standing Committee meetings held outside New York, which the host organizations are unable to meet in full, are shared by the member organizations of the Fund. Such additional costs have not been significant over the years, as host organizations have often been able to provide fully the services and facilities without charge to the Fund.

S. Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

44. In accordance with long-standing practice and the requirements of Article 17, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, the Advisory Committee from time to time travels in order to meet with specialized agencies of the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency at their headquarters. The Advisory Committee occasionally also travels in order to visit peacekeeping operations, regional commissions and other United Nations Offices away from Headquarters, such as the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna.

45. The last time the Advisory Committee met away from Headquarters was in 1995. It next plans to travel in 1998. The trips abroad are in the interest of efficiency and good management, as they are in direct pursuit of specific reports required by the General Assembly and other legislative bodies, and enable the Advisory Committee to gain first-hand knowledge of the programmes and operations under review. Owing to the pressure of work at Headquarters, the Advisory Committee cancelled its 1996 round of consultations with the specialized agencies and IAEA. However, it intends to resume that important coordination function as soon as possible.

T. Board of Auditors and Panel of External Auditors of the United Nations, the Specialized Agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency

46. General Assembly resolution 1438 (XIV) of 5 December 1959 provides that the cost of the meetings of the Panel of External Auditors shall be borne by participating organizations. The Panel does not in fact have an established headquarters. It normally holds one session each year and alternates its sessions between a United Nations headquarters location and a specialized agency. That pattern is followed in order to ensure equity in the provision of conference-servicing facilities by host organizations.

47. In accordance with part I, paragraphs 1 and 2, of its rules of procedure, the Board of Auditors shall convene annually at Headquarters in June and may convene at such other times and places as may be necessary for the due performance of the duties of the Board at the request of the Chairman on any matter of the Board. A special session of the Board is usually held immediately after the Panel's session at the same venue. That pattern is advantageous in view of the interrelationship between the Board's agenda and the items for consideration by the Panel. Moreover, as the members of the Board are also members of the Panel, additional travel costs are avoided.

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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

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Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

U. Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

1. In accordance with the plan of action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/181 of 19 December 1991, the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was requested to organize alternately during the Decade seminars in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, where most of the colonial Territories are situated. They have been considered to be an important forum for enabling the Special Committee to get access to first-hand information about the Territories and to listen to the views of the representatives of the Territories, as well as the States and organizations in those regions.

2. These seminars have been necessitated by the lack of formal cooperation on the part of some administering Powers and their refusal to extend invitations to send United Nations visiting missions to the Territories. The Special Committee has repeatedly stated that it is ready to review the role of the seminars once the administering Powers extend such invitations.

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3. In 1997 the Special Committee has devoted further attention to the question and discussed it informally with the administering Powers, that is, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, respectively. An agreement was included in General Assembly resolution 51/224, adopted without a vote on 27 March 1997. The Special Committee had also discussed the matter in depth in connection with the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/51/486), including a presentation at the meeting of the Special Committee by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, a report of the Special Committee on the subject (A/AC.109/2085), as well as a letter from the Chairman of the Special Committee addressed to the Secretary-General (A/52/220).

4. The report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services clearly indicated that there were no financial irregularities or misuse of funds. However, the Special Committee considered that some of the erroneous conclusions in the report should have been avoided and the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services pledged to take into consideration the concerns of the Special Committee. Nevertheless, the Special Committee has again reviewed the seminars, which are still considered to be an essential component of its work.